

Message Text

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8321
INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS
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AMEMBASSY PARIS
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USMISSION USNATO
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 VALLETTA 02117

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PEPR, MT, UK
SUBJECT: MINTOFF BLASTS BRITISH PRESS, BBC AND
- BRITISH GOVERNMENT

1. SUMMARY: MINTOFF, REPORTING TO PARLIAMENT JULY 10, SAID THAT THE GOM BANNED BRITISH JOURNALISTS BECAUSE OF UNFAIR AND INACCURATE REPORTING. THE BRITISH PRESS AND BBC MUST REPORT "THE VIEWS OF THE MAJORITY" OF THE MALTESE PEOPLE BY JULY 14 OR "OTHER STEPS", PRESUMABLY AFFECTING THE BRITISH FORCES, WILL BE TAKEN. WE ARE PUZZLED BY THIS MINTOFFIAN OUTBURST BUT DOUBT THAT MINTOFF WILL DO ANYTHING TO JEOPARDIZE HIS LAST BASE RENTAL PAYMENT WHICH IS DUE IN OCTOBER. END SUMMARY.

2. IN A STATEMENT TO PARLIAMENT JULY 10, PUBLISHED IN THE LOCAL PRESS JULY 11, PRIME MINISTER MINTOFF EXPLAINED
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THE GOM'S (I.E., HIS) DECISION TO BAN BRITISH JOURNALISTS FROM MALTA. MINTOFF BEGAN BY RECALLING THE "CAMPAIGN OF LIES" WAGED BY UK NEWSPAPERS CONCERNING EVENTS IN MALTA DURING THE 1971/72 BASE NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT AND SAID THE GOM HAD EXPECTED SIMILAR ATTACKS AS MARCH 31, 1979 APPROACHED IN SPITE OF ASSURANCES FROM THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT OF BRITAIN'S FRIENDSHIP FOR

MALTA AND APPROVAL OF WHAT THE GOM INTENDED TO DO IN 1979.

3. MINTOFF THEN LISTED THREE EXAMPLES OF "MALICIOUS" JOURNALISTIC REPORTING ABOUT MALTA.

- FIRST, DURING MAY, 1978 STORIES PUBLISHED BY THE DAILY MAIL CONCERNING A BRITISH GOVERNMENT REQUEST TO EXTRADITE JOHN GAUL (WANTED FOR MURDER IN THE UK) CLAIMED THAT THE GOM WAS KEEPING GAUL UNTIL AN EXCHANGE FOR A MALTESE CITIZEN WHOSE EXTRADITION HAD BEEN REQUESTED FROM THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT BY THE GOM HAD BEEN ARRANGED. MINTOFF CHARACTERIZED THIS ASSERTION AS A GROSS LIE ABOUT THE GOM AND CHARGED THAT THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT "PURPOSELY REFRAINED FROM EVER DOING ANYTHING TO DENY IT" ALTHOUGH THEY WERE AWARE OF THE "FULL FACTS" AND THE MALTESE JUSTICE MINISTER HAD PROTESTED AGAINST THE DAILY MAIL REPORT.

- SECOND, ON JULY 3 AND 4, 1978 THE GUARDIAN, THE FINANCIAL TIMES AND THE DAILY TELEGRAPH CARRIED ARTICLES ABOUT COL. QADHAFI'S VISIT TO MALTA BY TWO MALTESE CORRESPONDENTS WHO, ACCORDING TO MINTOFF, WERE WELL-KNOWN FOR THEIR "HATRED OF THE MALTESE GOVERNMENT". THESE NEWSPAPERS DID NOT CONTACT THE GOM TO CHECK ON THE TRUTH OF THESE REPORTS.
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- THIRD, THE BBC HAD INTERVIEWED A MALTESE MINISTER ON ANGLO-MALTESE RELATIONS LAST YEAR BUT SUBSEQUENTLY REFUSED TO BROADCAST THE INTERVIEW ON BBC TELEVISION. IN MARCH, 1978, STEVE BRADSHAW ON BBC'S RADIO 4 ATTACKED THE GOM FOLLOWING WHICH THE GOM JUSTICE MINISTER PROTESTED TO THE BRITISH HIGH COMMISSIONER "BUT TO NO AVAIL". ON JULY 3 THE BBC ONCE MORE "REVEALED ITS VENOM" TOWARD THE GOM WHEN ONE OF ITS REPORTERS MIXED UP A REPORT ON PRESIDENT QADHAFI'S RECENT VISIT TO MALTA AND USED AS A "WITNESS" ONE OF THE ANTI-GOM MALTESE CORRESPONDENTS MENTIONED PREVIOUSLY.

4. MINTOFF SAID THAT HE HAD HIS PRIVATE SECRETARY MEET WITH BRITISH HIGH COMMISSIONER (ASPIN) TO MAKE HIM AWARE OF WHAT WAS HAPPENING AND TO INFORM HIM THAT THE GOM WAS NO LONGER PREPARED "TO SWALLOW THE MYTH THAT THE BRITISH PRESS WERE PURE AND INDEPENDENT ANGELS". ASPIN WAS TOLD THAT THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT HAS THE MEANS TO INTERVENE AND MAKE ITS VIEWS KNOWN "TO THESE POWERFUL IMPERIALISTIC TOOLS", PARTICULARLY THE BBC. TO SHOW HOW SERIOUSLY THE GOM WAS TAKING THIS SITUATION, MINTOFF'S PRIVATE SECRETARYKK

TOLD ASPIN THAT THE GOM'S FIRST STEP WAS TO BAR BRITISH CORRESPONDENTS OF THE BBC, AND THE BRITISH NATIONAL DAILIES. THEN, IF WITHIN A WEEK THE BBC DOES NOT BROADCAST "THE OTHER SIDE OF THE COIN, THE VIEWS OF THE MALTESE MAJORITY", THE GOM IS PREPARED TO TAKE "OTHER STEPS".

5. MINTOFF DENIED THAT THIS DECISION WAS IN ANY WAY CONNECTED WITH WHAT HE REFERRED TO AS THE "HORSE DUNG SITTING" OF THE BRITISH PARLIAMENT (A REFERENCE TO A RECENT INCIDENT DURING A SITTING OF THE BRITISH PARLIAMENT WHERE HIS DAUGHTER THREW HORSE MANURE AT THE SPEAKER). HE ALSO ASSERTED THAT "IT WAS ANOTHER BIG LIE ON THE PART

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OF THE FOREIGN OFFICE AND THE BBC" WHEN THEY CLAIMED THAT THEY DID NOT KNOW WHY BRITISH CORRESPONDENTS WERE BARRED FROM MALTA.

6. IN RESPONSE TO OPPOSITION QUESTIONS, MINTOFF STATED THAT BRITISH GOVERNMENT INACTION ON THE GAUL CASE WAS "ON PURPOSE" AS IT HAD THE MEANS TO CHECK THE FACTS. THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT, THE BRITISH PRESS AND THE BBC "WERE ONE AND THE SAME THING" AND THE INDEPENDENCE OF THE BRITISH PRESS WAS "AN IMPERIALISTIC LIE". WHEN THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT WANTED TO "HUSH SOMETHING UP" SUCH AS

SCANDALS INVOLVING BRITISH MINISTERS IT DOES SO. THE
BRITISH PRESS HAS NEVER CARRIED WHAT "THE MAJORITY OF THE
MALTESE PEOPLE BELIEVE" WHICH SHOWED THAT IN SPITE OF
THEIR LIP SERVICE TO FRIENDSHIP WITH MALTA IN ACTUAL FACT
THEY WANTED TO HARM THE MALTESE PEOPLE, TO GIVE MALTA A
BAD IMAGE IN THE UK AND TO GIVE THE MALTESE PEOPLE A BAD
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IMAGE OF THE MALTESE GOVERNMENT.

7. THE IMAGE THE GOM WANTED TO PROJECT BY TAKING THESE
STEPS, CONTINUED MINTOFF, WAS THAT OF A GOVERNMENT DEFEND-
ING ITSELF FROM "UNJUST ATTACKS". MINTOFF DENIED THAT
BARRING BRITISH CORRESPONDENTS ENTAILED A SUPPRESSION OF
HUMAN RIGHTS AND ASSERTED HUMAN RIGHTS DID NOT MEAN THAT
"A BIG NATION OVERPOWERS A SMALL NATION, NOT EVEN GIVING
IT A CHANCE TO PUT FORTH ITS POINT OF VIEW". MOREOVER,
THE BRITISH DID NOT KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT HUMAN RIGHTS;
IF THE BRITISH TELL HIM (MINTOFF) THAT THESE WERE HUMAN
RIGHTS HE WOULD TELL THEM "PUSH THEM UP YOUR JUMPER"
(SIC).

8. MINTOFF THEN SAID THAT THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT COULD
MAKE IT POSSIBLE FOR BRITISH JOURNALISTS TO COME TO MALTA
"TOMORROW" BY HAVING BBC WITHDRAW THEIR GAUL STORY.
JOURNALISTS SHOULD PROTEST TO THE BBC.

9. RESPONDING TO AN OPPOSITION CLAIM THAT THIS DECISION
MIGHT BE COUNTER PRODUCTIVE MINTOFF SAID THAT "WHATEVER
IT PRODUCES THE MALTESE ARE READY TO FACE IT" AND CON-
CLUDED THAT HE WOULD WARN THE BRITISH THAT "THEY WILL
LEAVE BEFORE MARCH IF THEY WERE NOT CAREFUL".

10. COMMENT: NEITHER OUR BRITISH COLLEAGUES NOR WE CAN
ACCOUNT FOR THIS MINTOFFIAN OUTBURST. WE DID NOT HEAR
THE JULY 3 BBC BROADCAST BUT THE ARTICLES IN THE FINANCIAL
TIMES, WHICH STATED THAT QADHAFI WAS UNHAPPY WITH MINTOFF
FOR NOT HAVING PASSED ON TO THE MALTESE CONSUMERS THE
FULL BENEFIT OF HIS CONCESSIONARY PRICE FOR PETROLEUM
PRODUCTS, DO NOT SEEM THAT SIGNIFICANT. THE MOST PLAUSI-
BLE EXPLANATION APPEARS TO BE THAT MINTOFF IS SUFFERING
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FROM GENERAL FRUSTRATION WITH THE LACK OF PROGRESS IN HIS
ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE DIALOGUE WITH THE EUROPEANS, COMBINED
WITH A (PROBABLY) SINCERELY HELD BELIEF THAT THE BRITISH

PRESS GENERALLY IS HOSTILE TOWARD HIM AND HIS POLICIES AND HAS BEEN UNFAIR IN ITS REPORTING. LASHING OUT AT THE "IMPERIALIST BRITISH PRESS" MAY HAVE MERELY PROVIDED AN OUTLET FOR THIS FRUSTRATION. ON THE OTHER HAND IT COULD BE A CALCULATED TACTIC IN HIS EVOLVING STRATEGY WITH THE EUROPEANS OR CONCEIVABLY IN RESPONSE TO LIBYAN AND/OR ALGERIAN PRESSURE - A FASHIONABLE EXPLANATION IN SOME DIPLOMATIC AND OPPOSITION CIRCLES. WE SIMPLY DO NOT KNOW. WE DOUBT THAT IT IS CONNECTED WITH HIS DAUGHTER'S BEHAVIOR IN PARLIAMENT.

11. DURING ASPIN'S MEETING ON JULY 7 WITH MINTOFF'S PRIVATE SECRETARY, ASPIN WAS TOLD THAT IF THE GOM WAS NOT GIVEN "REDRESS" WITHIN A WEEK (I.E. BY JULY 14) THE BRITISH FORCES BROADCASTING SERVICE (BFBS) IN MALTA WOULD BE CLOSED. MINTOFF DID NOT REPEAT THIS SPECIFIC THREAT IN PARLIAMENT. HE LIMITED HIMSELF TO ASSERTING THAT THE GOM WAS PREPARED TO TAKE "OTHER STEPS" IN HIS FORMAL STATEMENT AND, DURING THE DEBATE, TO ADDING THE WARNING THAT UK FORCES MAY HAVE TO LEAVE BEFORE THE END OF MARCH, 1979. WITH RESPECT TO THE DURATION OF THE BAN ON BRITISH JOURNALISTS MINTOFF'S PRIVATE SECRETARY TOLD ASPIN THE BAN WOULD BE IN FORCE UNTIL MARCH 31, 1979 WHEREAS DURING THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE MINTOFF SEEMS TO HAVE SAID AFTER THE BBC WITHDREW ITS STORY ON THE JOHN GAUL EXTRADITION CASE BRITISH JOURNALISTS COULD COME TO MALTA "TOMORROW". PRESUMABLY BBC WOULD ALSO HAVE TO BROADCAST "THE OTHER SIDE OF THE COIN" AS WELL. WHAT MINTOFF'S INTENTIONS REALLY ARE REMAINS TO BE SEEN. SHOULD HE DEMAND THAT BFBS BE SHUT DOWN HE WOULD BE IN

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VIOLATION OF THE MILITARY FORCES AGREEMENT (MFA) WHICH
IN TURN WOULD JEOPARDIZE HIS LAST RENTAL PAYMENT - A
RISK MINTOFF WOULD SEEM UNLIKELY TO TAKE. LAINGEN

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